

ORM NEWS

From the Office of the Deputy Assistant
Secretary for Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs



August 2002

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



Many attendees of the recently held National Leaders Conference (NLC) have told me that it was a great success. I believe that!

Each of you had a hand in that success. The planning committee members helped. The staff at the conference helped. The ORM presenters helped. All of you, who continued to carry out your normal duties and took on additional duties, because other staff devoted their time to the conference, helped to ensure the success of this conference.

Each of you can and should take pride in the effort, we as an organization make, to help VA move towards its goal of becoming an Employer of Choice in and outside government.

This conference was important to VA because it addressed the Human Capital goals of VA. We play an important part in helping VA address these goals.

We, on a daily basis, help VA meet these goals through the services we provide in complaint processing, alternative dispute resolution, root cause analysis, and environmental assessments.

Topics specific to our programs were discussed at the conference. These included the complaint process, which is our core mission, as well as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) through Mediation. We also focused on prevention by helping managers understand the root causes of complaints so that they can better work with the employees at their facilities and help create an Employer of Choice environment in VA.

Your efforts in supporting the conference and in handling the day to day operations are to be commended. I want to thank each and every one of you for your efforts, not only in making the conference a success, but also in the day to day work you do in serving VA and our nations veterans.

/s/

James S. Jones

National Leaders' Conference

“Shaping the Future”

Cultivating a Dynamic and Dedicated Workforce through Excellence in Human Resources, Diversity, and Equal Employment Opportunity

Atlanta, Georgia, July 16 to July 18, 2002

Secretary Principi's Opening Remarks at the National Leaders' Conference

Hello, and greetings to everyone attending the National Leaders Conference.

Let me begin by commending the Offices of Human Resources Management, Diversity Management and EEO, and the Office of Resolution Management – all part of Human Resources and Administration – for your work to ensure VA employees pursue their mission of service in an environment that respects their individual dignity and rights.

Your commitment of time and resources ensures VA leaders meeting here will reap the benefits of your broad experience in the areas of diversity, human resources and equal employment opportunity.

In addition, this conference will provide VA's leaders with tools to deal more effectively with conflict and diversity in the workplace, encouraging us to focus on creating workplaces where employees are appreciated, respected, treated fairly, and valued, creating an employer of choice environment.

VA must create and sustain a work environment that allows us to achieve our best quality and be our most productive.

This conference is also designed to help VA executives identify and evaluate workplace grievances. With the tools made available at this conference, our leaders will learn how to apply the most appropriate agency resources to address employee grievances and help VA employees continue to provide the best possible service to our nation's veterans and their families.

We will have complaints; there will always be reasonable differences among reasonable people. By applying alternative dispute resolution, we will be able to resolve complaints as early as possible.

Of course, it is preferable to prevent complaints in the first place by creating an “Employer of Choice” environment where employees feel appreciated, respected,

treated fairly and valued. Prevention is always cheaper and more effective than treatment or cure.

VA is a large department employing over 220,000 people. However, even one finding of discrimination and retaliation is one too many. Over the last 4 years there have been 105 findings of discrimination and retaliation. This is simply unacceptable. It is costly in both resources and management. And most of all someone's self respect and dignity has been negatively affected in each case.

Our employees are the foundation of the Department. Their skills and their commitment to our mission are the keys to our ability to meet the needs of America's veterans. As leaders, we should always strive to sustain a positive atmosphere where all our employees feel a part of – and vital to – our mission.

In addition to providing our employees with the tools necessary to do their jobs well, we must ensure their work environments are free of any forms of harassment, discrimination and or bias.

This is imperative and I challenge the leaders of our agency to address the initiatives of this conference.

I also must stress the importance of succession planning. The federal workforce faces a crisis as highly skilled men and women representing countless years of institutional knowledge depart our ranks. We must think ahead of that departure curve and plan for the workforce of tomorrow.

We must recruit the best men and women, and at the same time we must retain the best men and women. Let this conference be the nexus for our succession plans, and let quality and diversity be a key element in that planning.

When we as leaders have successfully met the needs of our employees, when they know they are respected for their skills, listened to for their ideas, and appreciated for who they are as partners in our mission, then will we be truly redeeming the faith and confidence America's veterans place in our Department.

In the spirit of the conference theme, you can shape the future by cultivating a dynamic and dedicated workforce through excellence in human resources, diversity, and equal employment opportunity.

This conference will take us closer to a better future for all our Nation's veterans and I encourage all of you to make the most of every aspect of this outstanding learning experience. Tomorrow's leadership begins today."

(Secretary Principi's, July 16,2002, video taped opening remarks at the National Leaders' Conference)

Conference Highlights



The conference was very well attended and considered to be a success by the vast majority of those in attendance. Approximately 700 participants attended the conference; to include VA executives, EEO Program Managers, Human Resources Managers and complaint processing professionals. There were also a number of labor management representatives in attendance.

The opening session was held on Tuesday, July 16, with a video taped message from Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony J. Principi. The Secretary commented during his presentation that “one finding of discrimination is too many”. He further stated that the conference would take us closer to a better future for all our Nation’s veterans, “tomorrow’s leadership begins today.” The predominate message from the Secretary was that we must do the things in HR, diversity and EEO that will ensure that employees’ needs are met today and that we plan for a future that will ensure an environment within VA where veterans receive the highest level of service possible.

The Chief of Staff, Ms. Nora Egan, delivered the keynote address in the absence of the Secretary. Her comments were well received. She reiterated and expanded on the Secretary’s message.

Deputy Secretary, Dr. Leo MacKay, during his keynote address on the second day of the conference, stated “it’s VA’s quality work force that drives our quality programs and services. People are the measure of our Department’s self worth and will always hold the key to our success.” He gave a very stirring and thought provoking speech that talked about where we are and where we hope to be. He also discussed budgetary as well as other issues looming on VA’s horizon.

Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, Dr. Jacob Lozada, spoke on the topics; “Shaping the Future: Our Challenge” during the opening day and “Where Do We Go From Here” during the closing day of the conference.

VA General Counsel, Tim McClain, during his presentation “Reducing EEO Complaints: A Collaborative Effort.” talked about the importance of all parties understanding the complaint process and how to use the resources

available to help navigate the process. He reiterated that General Counsel represents the agency in the EEO complaint process and not individuals.

At the awards dinner, held on the evening of July 17,Th agency employees were recognized for their leadership and support in:

- **Promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution (*Pioneer Award*)**
Recipients: Guy McMichael, Patricia Sheridan, Fred Conway;
- **Training and Developing New Mediators (*Pace Setter Award*)**
Recipients: J. Sidney Davis, Ph.D., Gayle Sipes, J.D., Earl Parsons, J.D., Kathleen Binder, J.D., Sue Meyer, J.D., and Naomi Sweeting;
and
- **Developing and Producing the VA Mediation Handbook (*Outstanding Achievement*)** - Recipients: Timothy May, Steve Becker, Denise Bryant, David Cox, Susan Cox, Gus Guerra, Carl Hensley, II, Elaine Marshall, Ada Neale, Jane Nygaard, Patricia Sheridan, Joe Simon, Naomi Sweeting, Janet Thompson, and Tom Wall.

Panel discussions were held on: “Human Resources and Diversity Program Expectations” and “Understanding the President’s Management Agenda.” Panel participants included Dr. Lozada and other senior VA officials

Participants attended a selection of the 64 workshops offered during the conference. Workshop offerings were chosen in advance by each participant according to their interest. Subject matter experts from within and outside the agency served as instructors for these workshops. Workshops designed specifically for the needs and interest of executives were also offered. Course offerings included: Diversity Issues; Impact on Operations; How to Survive an EEO Complaint; Enlightened Leadership; Labor Relations for VA Executives; Preventing Workplace Stress and Aggression.

Guest speakers included: Stephen M. Gower, CEO, The Gower Group, “What People See When They See You Coming”; Cynthia Butler-Blucher, Vice President, Jefferson Parrish School District, “Accepting the Responsibility”; and Michael Hunt, “Dream Makers: Putting Vision and Values to Work”; and Martin Luther King, III.

The conference was very interactive, with participants asking questions and providing comments throughout the proceedings.

Terry Washington, External Affairs Program



ORM – How Can We Help You?

The Office of Resolution Management (ORM) processes discrimination complaints, but are there other valuable services provided to VA by ORM?

This was the topic of one of the workshops offered at the National Leaders' Conference. The facilitators for the workshop were Charlotte Jones, Lillette Turner, and Alison Mangels. The workshop highlighted ORM services such as: training, case law research, settlement agreement tips, alternative dispute resolution and advice on complying with orders from EEOC and OEDCA, to name a few.

During the presentation, there was an opportunity for the participants to receive an up-date on services provided by ORM, as well, as share concerns and/or suggestions to improve ORM's delivery of services. The interactions resulted in the expression of two main concerns:

1. **Communication** - Field facilities look for guidance from ORM in the complaint process. For example, they asked for more open communication with Responsible Management Officials (RMO), such as an explanation of the investigative process, as well as what occurs after the investigation.
2. **Consistency** - ORM was asked to share our Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) with field facilities and strive to be as consistent as possible in the application of those procedures.

The presentation of the workshop received favorable reviews and ORM as an organization was commended for the strides made in the decrease in the timeframe for processing EEO complaints of discrimination.

Alison Mangels, Executive Assistant to the COO
Charlotte Jones, Regional EEO Officer

Notes from the Field

Office of the DAS

[Anthony \(Tony\) Hawkins](#), Special Assistant to the DAS, was awarded the [2002 NAACP Benjamin L. Hooks Distinguished Service Award](#) at the Armed Services, Veterans Affairs Award Dinner during the 93rd Annual NAACP Convention in Houston, Texas on July 9, 2002. The award, presented by Kweisi Mfume, President and CEO of the NAACP, was in recognition of his "Outstanding Contributions to Equal Opportunity." Tony recently joined ORM. He was formerly the Associate Director of VA's Center for Minority Veterans.

Little Rock Field Office

[James & Dan Ogeltree](#) (twins), sons of [Wanda Ogletree](#), EEO Investigator, were both inducted into *Who's Who Among American High Students* for 2002. They are in their junior year of high school (Jim has a 3.9 GPA and Dan has a 3.3 GPA). James was nominated to attend the *National Youth Leadership Forum on Law* to be held in Washington, DC. The weeklong conference is scheduled for this fall.

ORM Little Rock welcomes [Ava' Maria Knight-Brown](#), EEO Counselor, to their office.

Leavenworth Field Office

[Hwa-soon \(Sue\) Thorson](#), [Lorene Mumm](#), [Pamela Grosdidier](#), and [Pamela Randolph](#) attended the Federal Executive Board Shared Neutrals Refresher Training on June 27, 2002.

[Gregg Buckner](#), [Yuri Walker](#), and [Cindy Bukowsky](#) provided EEO training to supervisors and managers at the St. Louis VAMC on June 18 and 19, 2002. The session was entitled, "Defining EEO Complaints Allows for Early Resolution."

During the week of June 17, 2002, employees gathered to work on Team Building and a Business Plan for FY 2003. An Awards Ceremony was held on June 20. Employees recognized for their contributions were: [Pam Randolph](#), Counselor Award; [Iceola Gillom](#), Investigator Award; [Gregg Buckner](#), Intake and Peer Awards; and [Cindy Boyd](#), Peer Award.

Los Angeles Field Office

The Los Angeles Field Office is proud to announce that [Karen Civitate](#), EEO Investigator, C1, received her Associates Degree in Liberal Studies on June 13, 2002, and is now pursuing her Bachelor's degree in Psychology. Karen also received accolades from the Director at the St. Louis Medical Center and the Network Director, VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network, VISN 6, Durham, North Carolina, for a job well done as an instructor for the Basic Mediation course. During the same period she also completed her investigative assignments and participated in Atlanta Justice Center Training and is currently co-mediating cases for VISN 22 as well as other EEOC cases. Kudos Karen

Washington Field Office

[Cheryl R. Thompson](#), Counselor, joined the Washington Field Office on July 15, 2002. Cheryl comes to ORM from the Department of Transportation. [Cheryl Campbell](#) participated in last month's Komen Race for the Cure (for Breast Cancer). (Vanessa Deal was erroneously identified as having participated in this event).

Office of Policy and Compliance

The follow-up article on Settlement Agreement Tips & Techniques will appear in the September edition of the newsletter.

Did You Know?

We would like to welcome on-board our new Information Technology Services (ITS) support partners—Multimax, Inc. Multimax, headquartered in Largo, MD, is no stranger to our environment. They have been providing services to ORM's ITS since 1999, initially as a subcontractor, and now as a prime contractor. Consequently, their technicians and engineers have extensive knowledge of our environment, operations, people, and culture.

Among other things, Multimax will be responsible for providing LAN services, WBTS support, desktop hardware and software maintenance and monitoring, and help desk technical support related to client services and deployments. More specifically, Multimax will provide:

- ◆ Help desk phone coverage Monday through Friday, from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. EST
- ◆ Centralized network management, operation, and monitoring.
- ◆ Client services, including desktop management, data backup, problem detection and correction, desk-side and remote user support.
- ◆ WBTS maintenance support.
- ◆ Desktop, server, and telecommunications security.
- ◆ Customer outreach, including training support.

In the near future, ITS will be developing a web-based questionnaire for your input. We want to obtain your feedback on the quality of the service we are providing and get your opinions on additional services that you, our customers, would like to have.

We are looking forward to having Multimax on our team to help us provide you with excellent technical services and support. For more information on them, you can visit their web site at www.multimax.com.

ORM Environmental Assessment

During my first meeting with you at our Orlando employees' conference in 2001, we discussed how we could improve the working environment within ORM. As a first step in this process, you will soon be asked to participate in an environmental assessment survey of ORM. Additional details about this assessment will be provided to you during my next all employees conference call on Aug 5th at 2:00 EST.

A group that is not part of ORM will conduct this assessment. The responses will be analyzed and a report provided to all ORM employees. We will then develop a plan of action and take steps to make improvements.

No element of ORM is exempt from the assessment or the process for improvement. That includes my office. I encourage each of you to participate in this initiative. Your candid responses, which will be confidential, will help us improve.

I believe in getting feedback from those around me. I have done this for years. The most recent one was a "360 degree" assessment conducted in April and May of 2002. I see feedback as a "positive" even when the feedback is not complimentary. It's beneficial because:

1. I learn something about how I can improve;
2. I learn about misperceptions, which helps me address these misperceptions;
3. Those providing feedback are given a "voice" and the resulting dialog between us helps us to change our perceptions and, possibly, improve the effectiveness of our relationships;
4. It improves communication within the organization; and
5. Contributes to greater levels of trust and respect between managers and employees.

Our Climate Assessment is very important to all of us in helping improve our working environment and in helping set a standard for improvement throughout VA. I hope each of you will participate in the survey.

/s/
James S. Jones

Reminders:

Click on ORM's Web site at <http://vaww.va.gov/orm> for the latest information on ORM programs, policies, and employee information.

ORM NEWS is a monthly publication of the Office of Resolution Management. Please E-mail Terry Washington, External Affairs Program Analyst or Tyrone Eddins, External Affairs Program Manager, to submit your recommendations, suggestions, or comments on the information presented in this newsletter. We can be reached at (202) 501-2800. Back copies of the newsletter can be found on our Web site at <http://www.va.gov/orm/NewsEvents.htm>.